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# *Rebuffing Israel, U.S. Allows Censure Over Settlements*

By Somini Sengupta and Rick Gladstone

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UNITED NATIONS — Defying extraordinary pressure from President-elect Donald J. Trump and furious lobbying by Israel, the Obama administration on Friday allowed the United Nations Security Council to adopt a resolution that condemned Israeli settlement construction.

The administration's decision not to veto the measure reflected its accumulated frustration over Israeli settlements. The American abstention on the vote also broke a longstanding policy of shielding Israel from action at the United Nations that described the settlements as illegal.

While the resolution is not expected to have any practical impact on the ground, it is regarded as a major rebuff to Israel, one that could increase its isolation over the paralyzed peace process with Israel's Palestinian neighbors, who have sought to establish their own state on territory held by Israel.

Applause broke out in the 15-member Security Council's chambers after the vote on the measure, which passed 14 to 0, with the United States ambassador, Samantha Power, raising her hand as the lone abstention. Israel's ambassador, Danny Danon, denounced the measure, and castigated the council members who had approved it.

“Would you ban the French from building in Paris?” he told them.

The resolution describes the settlement building as a “major obstacle” to peace and demands that Israel stop the construction, which most the world regards as illegal.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who had scrambled in recent days to

stop the measure from coming to a vote, issued a blistering denunciation afterward.

“Israel rejects this shameful anti-Israel resolution at the U.N. and will not abide by its terms,” Mr. Netanyahu said in a statement. “At a time when the Security Council does nothing to stop the slaughter of half a million people in Syria, it disgracefully gangs up on the one true democracy in the Middle East, Israel, and calls the Western Wall ‘occupied territory.’ ”

Mr. Netanyahu immediately retaliated against two of the countries that sponsored the resolution. He ordered Israel’s ambassadors to New Zealand and Senegal to return home for consultations, canceled a planned visit to Israel next month by Senegal’s foreign minister and cut off all aid programs to Senegal.

The vote came a day after Mr. Trump personally intervened to keep the measure, which had been originally proposed by Egypt, from coming up for a vote on Thursday, as scheduled. Mr. Trump’s aides said he had spoken to Mr. Netanyahu. Both men also spoke to the Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Egypt postponed the vote under what that country’s United Nations ambassador called intense pressure.

But in a show of mounting exasperation, four other countries on the Security Council — Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal and Venezuela — all of them relatively powerless temporary members with rotating two-year seats, snatched the resolution away from Egypt and put it up for a vote Friday.

The Obama administration has been highly critical of Israel’s settlement building, describing it as an impediment to a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has long been the official United States position, regardless of the party in power.

Mr. Trump, who had urged the administration to veto the resolution, has made clear that he will take a far more sympathetic approach to Israel when his administration assumes office on Jan. 20.

Mr. Trump's comments on the resolution amounted to his most direct intervention on United States foreign policy during his transition to power. Minutes after the Security Council vote was announced, Mr. Trump made his anger known in a Twitter posting, saying: "As to the U.N., things will be different after Jan. 20th."

A range of senators and congressmen from both parties also denounced the resolution, a reflection of the deep loyalty to Israel shared by Democrats and Republicans. Senator Chuck Schumer of New York said, "It is extremely frustrating, disappointing and confounding that the administration has failed to veto this resolution."



Construction at an Israeli settlement in the West Bank in 2015.

Tomas Munita for The New York Times

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who oversees a subcommittee that oversees United Nations funding by the United States, threatened to take steps that could "suspend or significantly reduce" that financing.

Reaction to the resolution also illustrated fissures among American Jews regarding Israeli policy. Some, like the World Jewish Congress and American Jewish Committee, called the resolution a one-sided measure that would not help the peace process. Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, said in a statement: “It is also disconcerting and unfortunate that the United States, Israel’s greatest ally, chose to abstain rather than veto this counterproductive text.”

Other groups that have grown increasingly critical of the Israeli government’s approach to the peace process applauded the resolution and the Obama administration’s decision not to block it.

J Street, a Washington-based organization that advocates a two-state solution, said the resolution “conveys the overwhelming support of the international community, including Israel’s closest friends and allies, for the two-state solution, and their deep concern over the deteriorating status quo between Israelis and Palestinians and the lack of meaningful progress toward peace.”

Ms. Power, the United States ambassador, portrayed the abstention as consistent with the American disapproval of settlement-building, but she also criticized countries at the United Nations for treating Israel unfairly. She said the United States remained committed to its “steadfast support” for Israel and reminded the council that Israel received an enormous amount of American military aid.

Ms. Power said the United States chose not to veto the resolution, as it had done to a similar measure under Mr. Obama in 2011, because settlement building had accelerated so much that it had put the two-state solution in jeopardy, and because the peace process had gone nowhere.

“Today the Security Council reaffirmed its established consensus that settlements have no legal validity,” she said. “The United States has been sending a message that settlements must stop privately and publicly for nearly five decades.”

She also rebuked Palestinian leaders for “too often” failing to condemn violence against Israeli civilians. But she directed a portion of her remarks to Mr. Netanyahu,

whose relations with the Obama administration have never been warm.

“One cannot simultaneously champion expanding Israeli settlements and champion a viable two-state solution that would end the conflict,” she said, arguing that the settlements have undermined Israel’s security.

Israel’s ambassador, Mr. Danon, who had exhorted the American delegation to block the measure, expressed his anger in a statement that looked forward to a change in policy under Mr. Trump.

“It was to be expected that Israel’s greatest ally would act in accordance with the values that we share and that they would have vetoed this disgraceful resolution,” he said.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations, welcomed the resolution’s adoption but tempered his approval with a warning. “In reality, today’s action may be too little too late,” he said. “After years of allowing the law to be trampled and the situation to spiral downward, today’s resolution may rightly be seen as a last attempt to preserve the two-state solution and revive the path for peace.”

The resolution condemned Israeli housing construction in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank as a “flagrant violation under international law” that was “dangerously imperiling the viability” of a future peace settlement establishing a Palestinian state.

The resolution also included a nod to Israel and its backers by condemning “all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction.” That language is diplomatic scolding aimed at Palestinian leaders, whom Israel accuses of encouraging attacks on Israeli civilians.

Hamas, the Palestinian group that controls the Gaza Strip and is deemed a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel, expressed appreciation to the Security Council. “We praise the countries that voted for the resolution,” said Hazem Kasseem,

a spokesman for the group. “We emphasize the need to turn such a resolution into action, not only to halt settlements but to eradicate Israel’s occupation in all its forms.”

Peter Baker contributed reporting from Jerusalem, and Mark Landler from Washington.

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